

2 pages



May. 18. 2015 7:19PM



May 18, 2015

Honorable Members
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Support for Industry Funded Disposal Programs for Unused Household Medications

Dear Supervisors Carbajal, Wolf, Farr, Adam, and Lavagnino:

On behalf of our combined organizations and members, we would like to express our strong support for a county ordinance that would require pharmaceutical manufacturers to develop, implement, and fund safe and accessible programs for the disposal of household drugs. Such an industry supported program will keep tons of pharmaceutical waste out of our waterways each year and represent an important step toward protecting both public and environmental health.

Pharmaceutical chemicals are regulated because of their impacts on humans and other living organisms. They do not belong in our waterways, yet depression, anti-anxiety, anti-epileptic, tranquilizing, and other types of drugs (both prescription and over the counter) are being detected in the state's drinking water sources and aquatic habitats. Eighteen pharmaceuticals have been found in the South San Francisco Bay, with the antibiotic sulfamethoxazole detected at concentrations approaching levels of concern for aquatic life.

One of the key causes of pharmaceutical pollution is the improper disposal, either down the drain or in the trash, of household medications. Wastewater treatment is not able to completely remove these complex chemicals. Consequently, flushing drugs down the drain increases water pollution. The same happens when drugs are thrown in the trash. After they are landfilled, the chemicals leach into the effluent in the landfill. That liquid can leach into groundwater or is siphoned off and goes through the wastewater treatment process, with the same result as flushing.

The environmental effects of pharmaceuticals are well documented. Reproductive failure in aquatic species due to changes to sex organs, endocrine disruption, sex reversal, and impaired eggs and sperm density can be linked to synthetic estrogens in oral contraceptives. Antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs at levels found in water sources can reduce sociability, reduce reaction to predators, and alter foraging habits. Some drugs bioaccumulate up the food chain. For instance, drugs to treat hypertension, angina, arrhythmia, and migraine, as well as antihistamines have been found in San Francisco Bay mussels.

While human exposure to drugs through drinking water or eating contaminated food are generally below therapeutic levels, the ultimate effect of continued long-term exposure to chemical mixtures, the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria, and the impacts on vulnerable populations such as fetuses and infants are poorly understood. Studies that show how exposure to small amounts of various drugs can effect embryonic kidney cells, as well as blood and breast cancer cells, demonstrate the need to take action now to reduce the medications entering water resources, before rising rates of pollution cause serious public health problems.

No. 0685 P. 1

Expanding proper disposal options has been clearly demonstrated to effectively prevent medications from entering our waters or from being misused. For instance, San Francisco's pilot program, which allowed residents to drop off medications at local police stations and 13 pharmacies succeeded in keeping over 18 tons of pharmaceuticals out of San Francisco Bay and its tributaries over the course of just 30 months. However, such programs need to be extended to ensure that all Bay Area residents have equitable access to proper disposal options. To do this, drug manufacturers need to take responsibility for the end of their products' useful lives.

Pharmaceutical companies support collection programs in other industrialized nations, despite the fact that consumers pay a smaller percentage of their income on medications than do U.S. residents. This has proven to be both a beneficial public service and a cost effective strategy. When companies work together, the cost is so low (usually pennies per returned medication) they have not raised drug prices.

California is a leader in protecting both its people and the environment we live in. Alameda County is in the process of implementing its ordinance. That law has twice been upheld by the courts, who have found that requiring drug manufacturers to be responsible for the life cycle of their products is fair, affordable for the industry, and does not disrupt interstate commerce. We urge you and your colleagues on the Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors to follow the example of Alameda, San Mateo, and San Francisco Counties by passing an ordinance that requires manufacturers to do their share by supporting similar disposal programs in your county.

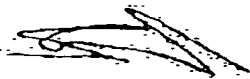
Sincerely,



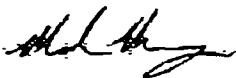
Andria Ventura
Toxics Program Manager
Clean Water Action



Bill Alayaud
California Director of Government Affairs
Environmental Working Group



Stiv Wilson
Campaigns Director
Story of Stuff



Mark Murray
Executive Director
Californians Against Waste

Jeanne Rizzo, R.N.
President and CEO
Breast Cancer Fund